

U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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Dear Fellow Marylander,

I am a [glass-is-half-full](#) kind of person. I try to be optimistic as much as possible. Sometimes it isn't easy. This week was one of those times.

As you may be aware, the Senate held a debate this week on voting rights legislation called the “[Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act](#).” If you’ve read some of my previous emails, you understand that this bill would set a floor of basic guidelines for states to follow when it comes to federal elections.

The elections of 2020 were in the middle of a pandemic and we thought turnout would be lower than usual. Instead, we witnessed the [largest voter turnout in our nation’s history](#) because jurisdictions thought carefully about what would be safe and convenient for voters during this crisis. Many states looked to Washington, Oregon, Hawaii, [Colorado](#) and Utah for examples, as these states allowed their voters to vote by mail and use drop boxes well before the pandemic. Members of our military also have been allowed to vote by mail for years.

Unfortunately, Republican legislatures and governors who were unhappy with the results of the elections in 2020 have responded to historic voter participation by working overtime to [restrict voter accessibility](#). Basically, they want to curtail or limit the successful measures that helped citizens vote. It boggles the mind that in a nation that values freedom and democracy that anyone would openly be working to stop legitimate voters from exercising their right to vote. But that is [exactly](#) what is happening today.

Despite the rhetoric, the “*Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act*” does not say that each state needs to run elections exactly the same. This is not “[federalizing](#)” state election laws. Similar to national minimal standards that protect workers or highway safety, all 50 states, the District of Columbia and territories would have the same starting point when it comes to protecting the rights of American voters.

On the face of it, it sounds pretty common sense. Why then did [all 50 Republican senators](#) vote against a procedural motion that would have allowed passage of the “*Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act*”? They seem to have followed Mitch McConnell lockstep. As the president noted at his press conference Wednesday, much as the Republican leader tried to make Barack Obama a [one-term president](#), he has decided to prevent President Biden and Democrats from getting things done for the American people, for the most part. The collective goal seems to be to keep the country in limbo until the Republicans can get another chance at elections.

On the positive side, this last week we had a [real debate](#) on the floor of the United States Senate about voting rights and elections – like we haven’t had in years. Senators on opposing sides brought facts and examples to share. And, for the most part, it was respectful. For a moment, we were transformed to a different time and place when the Senate functioned. ([You can watch my floor remarks here.](#))

At this point, you are screaming at your phone or computer screen saying: “BEN, but they all voted AGAINST the bill!” If that’s what you are doing right now, you are correct. But we aren’t quite back to *Square One*. Out of the floor debate came what appears to be a good faith effort by some Republican senators to work with Democrats [to find common ground](#) on parts of the legislation. Most but not all Republicans continue to be in self-preservation mode, opposing anything that might actually help seniors, communities of color, disabled Americans, or any American whose work schedule doesn’t fit into the limited timeframe of a one-day, in-person Election Day.

It isn’t just the perpetual optimist in me that continues to believe that we can get some kind of bill over the finish line. I’ve been talking to my colleagues — Democrats and Republicans. What we can accomplish in the near term may be incomplete, but if we can take the nascent bipartisan dialogue and move something forward that can be of value to our nation and the stability of our democracy, it is a good thing.

Let me be clear: [voting is a fundamental part of who we are as a nation](#). It is a sacred constitutional right and it must be protected. I will not stop fighting for nationwide minimum standards and voter protections. I want to get dark money out of our political system and end gerrymandering. There are so many provisions in the “*Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act*,” like my bill to ban intentionally misleading voters that really are needed to bring fairness back to our electoral system.

Pushing the Senate to the edge of what many call “the nuclear option” on debate rules may not immediately have codified the voter protections we need. But it may have been the jolt the Senate needed to remind some senators that we really do need to work together on this and other issues.

I choose to see the glass half full right now because that optimism and hope fuels my efforts on behalf of Marylanders and the American people. Every senator swore an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. I will not stop in my efforts to protect the rights of our people because, while the arc of the moral universe may bend toward justice, it only does so when we push up against it.

As always, thank you for your time. Stay safe. Get your booster shot, please.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben". The letter "B" is large and stylized, with the "en" following in a cursive script.

Ben Cardin